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Washington, D.C. -- Seventeen public and private nonprofit groups have been approved to receive awards from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) under its Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem Program to develop new programs to assist homeless veterans.

VA Secretary-Designate Hershel Gober said, "The men and women of our nation's armed forces should not have to fear they will be homeless when their military service ends. These VA grants provide a foundation of community-based caregivers needed to offer a hand up -- not a handout -- to homeless veterans across the country.

"Combined with VA's specialized homeless assistance programs, the 101 grants VA has awarded over the past four years provide a solid base of community providers to help homeless veterans find the homes, jobs and security they deserve," said Gober.

Gober said 79 organizations applied for this year's VA grants.

Awardees from 17 cities in 14 states will receive grants totaling some \$3.3 million, ranging from \$6,000 to more than \$385,000. With this round of grants, there now is at least one recipient in 38 states and the District of Columbia.

The Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem Program, enacted in 1992 by Congress, gave VA the authority to provide assistance to establish community resources for homeless veterans through partnerships with public and nonprofit organizations. Through a competitive process, VA awards grants for up to 65 percent of the cost of acquiring, renovating, or constructing facilities. VA also can provide per diem payments, or in-kind assistance in lieu of per diem payments, to grant recipients or organizations that are eligible to receive a grant and provide supportive services and housing for homeless veterans.

VA is the only federal agency that provides substantial hands-on assistance directly to homeless veterans and currently directs several billion dollars from its regular or mainstream programs to assist hundreds of thousands of homeless and at-risk veterans. The department directed more than \$90 million in fiscal year 1997 to its specialized homeless assistance programs and proposes to spend more than \$96 million on such assistance in fiscal year 1998.

Information on the program is available on VA's Home Page, which can be reached through the Internet at <http://www.va.gov/health/homeless/index.htm>.